

Cary, N.C. - Good afternoon! It's a pleasure to be with you on this gorgeous fall day to help you celebrate the 10th annual Cary Diwali Festival! It's hard to believe it's been nearly a decade since we first gathered here in Cary to celebrate the lighting of the lamps, enjoy the artistic and culinary traditions of India and South Asia, and share in conversation and good cheer with our friends and neighbors.

And what a festival it's become! I'm told that in recent years you've had over 12,000 people attend this event, which has truly become one of the marquee cultural celebrations in the Triangle. I want to congratulate the volunteer leadership of Hum Sub on this tremendous success, as well as the Town of Cary for its steadfast support of this festival from the very beginning.

The success of this festival over the past decade is a testament to our area's strong and vibrant South Asian community, which has grown from a few hundred families to over 10,000 people in just three short decades.

Of course, much of this rapid growth can be attributed to the expansion of Research Triangle Park and the many businesses, universities, hospitals, and research facilities that surround it. But it also has a lot to do with what we all know to be true: that the Triangle is the best place in the nation to live, work, and raise a family.

And so today, Americans of all stripes can catch a Bollywood movie at the Galaxy Cinema, grab a delicious tandoori at one of the Triangle's many Indian restaurants, and, of course, come take in some world-class Indian dance and music at this annual event. I understand we're in store for a special treat tonight, when the Pandit Sisters take the stage with Parleen Singh of "Indian Idol" fame.

Diwali is also important not just as a unifying event for our community, but also because it reminds us of the values and principles that India and the United States have in common: democracy, pluralism, civil liberties, and a respect for diversity and human rights.

These shared values are reflected in a bilateral relationship that is today one of the closest and

most important our country possesses, as reflected in President Obama's decision to host Prime Minister Singh for his first official state dinner last year, in Secretary Clinton's early visit to New Delhi to launch a Strategic Dialogue between our two countries, and, of course, in President Obama's trip to India next month.

These visits are more than ceremonial: they represent a concerted effort at the highest levels to maintain and build upon the close relations our two nations have enjoyed in recent years, and to address the common challenges that face us both – even when we may disagree on the specific solutions.

While the ties between our two governments are strong, however, the real strength of our friendship derives from the relationships that exist between our two peoples: between Indian and American business leaders and investors, between exchange students and tourists traveling in both directions, and between Indian American families and their relatives back home.

Of course, the same holds true for those of you from other South Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, that have a strong presence in the Triangle community.

And so in the months and years ahead, all of you have a critical role to play, both in keeping your elected representatives in Washington informed of your views and in keeping the lines of communication open with your friends and relatives back home.

In the meantime, let's all enjoy this day of celebration and gratitude. Thank you again for inviting me to participate in this opening ceremony, and Happy Diwali to you all!

###